

## February 18, 2024 – First Sunday in Lent

### “Love Jesus and listen to Him” by Pastor Julio Romero

#### **Gospel: Mark 1:9-15**

About a month ago we celebrated the Lord’s Baptism, and here we are, listening again to the Gospel that tells us about the Lord’s baptism, from the same Gospel of Mark.

Transfiguration Sunday was last Sunday, and in that story, as well as in the story of the Lord’s Baptism, the voice of God is heard. In both stories God tells Jesus that He is His beloved Son, that He is well pleased and that we should listen to Him.

It is with these words that we gather on the First Sunday in Lent to continue these forty days until we arrive to the celebration of Easter.

The way I see the sequence of the Church Lectionary is that by setting these readings so close together, there must be something very important to tell us or to reflect upon coming from these stories.

God the Father loves his Son, He is pleased with Him, and wants us to listen to Him.

I can see these Gospel readings were not selected randomly but they are there for a reason. Here we are already moving and walking toward the celebration of Easter knowing that God loves Jesus, God wants us to listen to what Jesus has to tell us.

The Baptism of our Lord marks the beginning of His earthly ministry. After He is baptized by John, the Spirit takes Him into the wilderness where He spends forty nights and forty days. At the end of those forty days, He is tempted by Satan. Then He goes to his hometown of Nazareth where He is rejected, moves to Capernaum where He calls His first disciples and starts His ministry of healing, teaching and preaching the Good News of God.

At the end of his three years of ministry, He is crucified and then resurrected.

What I just recited is the Story of Jesus in a nutshell without the story of Christmas.

Most of us have been on our own journey for quite sometime already.

We have learned to love people, love the fruits of our work, love the joys and good times life has to offer and many, many other things that bring meaning and purpose into our own world.

As we journey, we have heard many voices: the voices of our parents, teachers, spouse, authorities, and so forth. But there is one love we should always have with us: our Love for Jesus. And one voice we should always listen to: His voice.

Listen to these words of wisdom told by an unknown writer:

I was headed home late from a wedding reception and had about a two-hour drive when a friend said to me, "Remember that for every mile you drive there are two miles of ditch". I was in the car before that really sunk in, and then it hit me, for every path we walk, there are two miles of ditch along the journey inviting us to veer off the road. Twice as many chances to stray away from God.

Few of us intend to go into the ditch. No one just drives down the road and says, "Hey I'm going to drive into the ditch". For most of us, it is a simple hugging of the shoulder of the road and little by little we move ourselves from the patch of following Jesus and somehow we end up off the road and in the ditch.

What the journey of Lent is about is trying to stay on the road, not to veer off it to end up in the ditch. Lent is also about making the extra effort to reflect on our Love for God and to be more intentional in listening to His voice. Furthermore, it is about reflecting on the cost of those times when we were in the ditch because we failed to love Jesus and listen to His voice.

This is the reason why the Season of Lent always calls us to the spiritual practice of self examination and repentance.

The classic example of the consequences of not loving Jesus and not listening to His voice is found in one person who was very close to Jesus and that's Judas.

He walked and journeyed with the Lord Jesus but didn't love him. Judas loved money more than he Loved Jesus; he sold Jesus for thirty coins. He put his personal agenda and self interest ahead of those of the Lord Jesus and while doing so, he veered off the road and found the ditch. A ditch so deep that he couldn't get out of it.

Veering off the road can cost us a lot. Life not only gets derailed but also we miss out on so much the Lord offers.

At the end of this Gospel, the Lord Jesus said, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.*” In another part of the Gospel the Lord Jesus asked what we should say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable could we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, he said. A tiny seed that when you look at it, you wouldn’t think of what it grows into.

Someone said:

The kingdom of God is like a VW Beetle of fifty or sixty years ago. It was one of the smallest cars you will ever see. It was not very comfortable or powerful. It was not very stylish or practical. It was very cheap and not impressive in any way. There was no status in owning one.

And yet, it was one of the most recognizable cars on the road. It grew from a cheap German mode of transport into a phenomenon. It was popular beyond imagining. It was loved and an integral part of social and sociological movements. It was a marketing miracle, a cultural icon. People may smile when they look at them, but they don’t really laugh. They were a success story beyond expectation. For many people, it was the car of choice.

Considering this illustration of what the Kingdom of God could be compared to in modern times, the Kingdom of God may not look like the greatest thing you have ever seen. When we talk about the Kingdom of God, let’s think of all the things you can do. Think of the energy and time you give or receive trying to heal, understand and accept others. Think of the energy and time invested in trying to make others feel that they are loved, in trying to make a difference in their life like the Lord Jesus did.

All the healing, the love and acceptance the Lord Jesus gave to so many people during his three years of ministry was too small, too insignificant for Judas, the one who betrayed the Lord Jesus, but for those who received Jesus’ love, energy and time, it meant the world to them. For them it was a miracle, the greatest thing that ever happened to them.

If there is no love for Jesus in our hearts and we don’t listen to His voice, we will never know what the Kingdom of God is like. Let’s walk this Lenten Journey, loving our Lord Jesus and listening to His voice. **Amen.**